

"No, I was just debating whether I'd ask Wilfred Greene. She's never liked me, I think, but I would be mean if I slighted her. She'd never get over talking, too."

"If she's that way, it seems to me it's best to have a little charity, and ask her," replied John.

"Do, auntie, I'd like to see her," exclaimed Tressa, her curiosity compatible with her years.

At 8 o'clock Seth Crane made the rounds of the village and delivered at every door an invitation to Miss Hepsy's Christmas night.

And John Rawson returned to his room at Junction House, full of great peace and love toward all men.

"Snow, auntie, all over, everywhere," said Tressa, as she jumped out of bed Christmas morning, nearly throwing over a lot of packages some one had placed by her bedside.

The village was soon astir. Tressa opened her store of packages, and kissed her aunt for every one.

About 10 o'clock Miss Hepsy opened the old melodeon in the parlor and sang a carol for Christmas. "Alleluia! Joy to the world!" she sang, and a lifetime of happiness trembled in every note. She was almost afraid the neighbors would guess her secret as she sang, but Tressa soon joined in, and her aunt felt more at ease.

Kitty Mooney had stepped in to lend a helping hand, and the big turkey was soon in readiness for the slow process of cooking. All the Jellies had been prepared days ago, and the pickle-shelf was well stocked.

"It sh'll be a super they'll never forgit," said Miss Hepsy to Tressa. "I've had no one here for a year come this spring, an' I want it fine. Would you use th' blue chiny, Tressa?" she asked, as she stood on a wooden kitchen chair and took a cup between her fingers.

"Oh, yes, auntie? It's so beautiful, no one'll be so mean as to break a single piece."

And Tressa's admiration and persuasion won her aunt.

The candle-light the small, neat house was in readiness, and the dining-room a mass of evergreens, Christmas berries and mistletoe. In the square parlor Kittie Mooney had hung a large piece of mistletoe from a screw in the ceiling. "Jes' over yer head, Miss Hepsy," she said, "where he'll be after kissin' yer," and Miss Hepsy blushed several times.

"Can you play a march, Tressa?" asked the prospective bride, hoping her piece was sufficiently educated.

"Oh, yes'm! I know several. The prettiest is the Turkish march," and she played it as well as she could on the old yellow keys.

"That'll do," said Miss Hepsy, delightedly. "It's beautiful." And she felt entirely ready. The pearl-gray dress lay on the bed, and a big bunch of white roses that had just come from

John. These she would carry in her hands.

"Well, I never!" exclaimed the Widow Greene, as she sat in Miss Hepsy's parlor with the rest of the guests. "Somethin's up, sure's I'm alive! Did you ever hear of a party, an' no hostess to receive you but that chit of a child, an' Kitty Mooney?"

"Not 'actly," replied Jerushy Martin, "but Miss Hepsy knows her mind. It's some surprise or nuther."

Lucindy Grimes and the Collinses nodded in assent.

Tressa had seated herself at the melodeon and was playing.

"It sounds pretty nice, don't it?" asked Matilda Collins of the widow.

"Sorter," said she, "but I like a plany better."

Some one was coming from the next room, all resplendent in gray, with a big bunch of cream roses in one hand. Her hair was all puffed, like the picture in Mrs. Collins's parlor. It was Miss Hepsy, and she fairly took Widow Greene's breath away. And a man stood near—"a tall, nice-lookin' man," whispered Jerushy Martin; and no one knew him. Before the fascinated company could utter another word, Parson Blair stood up and read the marriage service. Miss Hepsy's voice rang out sweetly in "I do," and some one was kissing the bride.

"I never seed such a surpriso!" said Widow Greene, fanning herself with the turkeytail feather fan; for she felt as warm as on a June day: "did you, Miss Collins? It beats me, I'll declare on 't!"

"Not sence Bess Fraser runned 'way." Every one then went up and kissed the bride, and Kittie Mooney asked them in to supper. And there was the blue china—every piece of it—as dainty and fragile as anything they'd ever seen.

"Kinder 'fraid to tech it!" said Lucinda to the widow.

"Why, ain't you got 'nough sense to hold it twixt your fingers?" and the widow bravely picked up her cup. But Lucinda could see the firm grip she had upon it.

Daniel Sellers was proposing a toast to the bride, and wished them joy, long life and prosperity.

Every one rose in affirmation.

"'Twas long ago," some one heard Miss Hepsy say, "John went 'cross the seas, an' we was to 've married as soon as he come back. Years passed an' I didn't hear no news of him. Then we moved away, an' I came here. Mother died, an' I sat evening after evening alone. Seemed as if no joy would ever come back to me, till a letter came from John. He had tracked me out in some way, an' come back to me."

"It reads like one o' them stories in your red book, Jerushy," said the widow, who felt at peace now with her neighbor.

Then everybody cheered for Miss Hepsy and her husband.

are not his ways. Most young cats, and many old ones, are common thieves, ready to leap on the dinner-table and grab something the moment your back is turned. 'Possum' is distinctly uncommon in these matters. He would scorn to make a flying exhibition of himself like that, or to conceal his designs. He even may be left in the dining-room alone with safety. It is only when we are all seated, and general feasting is in progress, that with the aid of a convenient chair he will calmly climb up, and leisurely select such portions of the food as to please him. If restrained at those times, he regards us with reproach, and continues his selection. If repulsed, he retreats with dignity, and returns presently with renewed determination. After all, he is the same kitten who once climbed the screen door and rallied to victory from the tomato vines.

But though a hero of perseverance, "Possum" is not distinguished as a warrior. He has faith in discretion, and is willing to rely on his speed rather than upon his skill and prowess in conflict. Not that he is a coward—at least, not cravenly so. When once faced in the right direction, I have seen him defy successfully a random dog, or the ten pound tom "tiger" across the way. His difficulty seems to be in getting into the attitude and direction of war. Perhaps his object in running is to get far enough ahead to enable him to turn around. He does fight, too, for he sometimes bears the earmarks of battle. I suppose they catch him now and then. On the morning after Thanksgiving he had a lump on his forehead, and still more recently he returned in a mixed condition of mud and water and humiliation after a night's absence. He lamented dismally while I had him in the tub, probably explaining how the cyclone had overtaken him before he could make harbor, and giving other valuable testimony.

One night I heard a violent altercation just outside my window, and when no longer able to restrain my curiosity, I rose and looked into the moonlight. A half-grown tree stands by our sidewalk. It was late autumn, and the leaves had disappeared. They had been replaced with something larger. I did not at first realize what the black bunches were that decorated the several limbs and forks of the little tree. Then one of the bunches moved; then all of them howled. Then I observed that it was a tree of cats. On the topmost bough there swung and balanced a feline form that evidently had been driven to a last retreat.

I descended to the kitchen, and returned with coal. Leaning out, I flung a hurtling handful, that resulted in a sudden and wild explosion of cats, leaving a single form still balancing on the topmost bough. Something about its outline caused me to discontinue the anthracite treatment. Then, the coast being quite clear, there was a cautious descent, a stealthy slipping along the path below, and into the white moonlight beneath my window there stepped with solemn tread our own great, gray, reliable "Possum."

Somehow we never connected "Possum" with romance, for he was so stately and reserved in his treatment of his neighbors. Even when we saw him considering with vague interest the slender black-and-white cat who occupied the cellar of the vacant house next door, we did not regard the matter as more than a casual acquaintanceship. Anyhow, being interested in building a new addition to our house, and in our gardening, we were too busy to take more than a passing interest in "Possum's" affairs.

On the whole, it seemed to be a rather hard summer for "Possum." His favorite corners were disordered; his favorite cushions tumbled and upset. Less than this has driven more than one bachelor to domesticity, and perhaps, after all, we were to blame.

When the house was settled at last, he returned much as usual, and presently fell into disfavor, through a persistence in occupying a newly and bluely upholstered chair, which we were trying to keep handsome and free from hairs. Repeated eviction and dire threats were of no avail. "Possum" slept in the chair whenever it stood upright, and protested when it was made uninhabitable with a book, or when its angle made rest a matter of discomfort and peril.

It was this later unkindness on our part that resulted in disaster to the chair, and in deep disgrace on the part of "Possum." I suppose I tipped the chair a little too suddenly, and "Possum" being dreaming perhaps thought he was falling over a precipice. At all events, he clawed and clung desperately, with the result that there were two long slits in the blue fabric that were as wounds in our hearts. When he was finally captured and banished, I said that this was the end. At sunrise he should die. It was simply a question whether I would tie our little feline brother to a tree and use him for target practice, or take him down cellar and quietly remove his head with my new saw. On the whole I preferred the raw, but the "precious ones" became violent at mention of such a method. They were for overlooking the whole affair and declaring that nothing should harm a hair of their "darling cat." Still I was unforgiving, and that forenoon—which was sunny and Sunday—when I saw him blinking at me from the steps, while I filled the vases from the marigold patch, I was indifferent and cool in my manner toward him. Presently, something was rubbing against my leg, and purring. I was surprised at this—it was not "Possum's" way. Neither was it "Possum," for when I looked down I saw it was the slender, and hitherto wild, black-and-white cat from the vacant cellar next door.

"Well," I said, "what does this mean? What do you want?"

The black-and-white cat looked up pleadingly, and continued to rub and purr.

"No, go away," I growled; "we do not want you. We've got one cat too many now."

The black-and-white cat looked up. "That's just what I want to talk about," she purred. "Our poor 'Possum'."

"Oh, our poor 'Possum!' Um—well, never mind our poor 'Possum.' He's in disgrace. He's torn my beautiful new chair with his claws."

"Yes," assented the black-and-white cat, thoughtfully, "I know. But do you always like to be pushed out of your favorite seat? And don't you sometimes have accidents, too?"

"What has that to do with it? 'Possum' is a cat. We gave him a good home—he should appreciate it. He was a stray cat, and we took him in."

"I—I am a stray, too," murmured the black-and-white cat.

"Well, what of it? What has that to do with 'Possum'?"

"I know how much he must appreciate his nice home," the black-and-white cat purred, softly. "I know he does, too, for he has told me about it, and of how good you are to him. I hope you will forgive him."

"Oh, well," I said, "I suppose we must. Go away now, and don't bother me."

The black-and-white cat nestled closer. "One thing more," she said. "Do you know that I—I'm 'Possum's' comfort, his companion in grief and sorrow, and that I have no friends or home?"

What was the use? After that the black-and-white cat took up residence in "Possum's" cellar, and ate out of "Possum's" pan.

Their family came along in time to brighten the dull winter days. There were three of them, and the resemblance was quite strong on both sides. I have never seen a prouder mother than the black-and-white cat. As for "Possum," his interest was one of curiosity rather than of paternal solicitude. He removed his quarters to a distant part of the cellar, perhaps so that he might enjoy a night's rest. When I brought him to the box of excelsior, and dropped him down among his family, he seemed disturbed, and the lavish endearments of the black-and-white cat, who put her face to his and purred and murmured and caressed him, only caused him to draw away with mingled embarrassment and indifference.

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### No Right to Complain.

"See here!" cried the irate man. "I propose to sue you. Look at my head! You professed to cure—"

"Wait a minute," interrupted the maker of Baldrey's Balsam. "We advertise merely that we cure partial baldness and not—"

"Well, I was only partially bald when I started using your stuff; now I haven't a hair!"

"Well, then you're cured of your partial baldness, aren't you?"—Catholic Standard and Times.

# The Tale of a Feline

By ALBERT BIGELOW PAINE.

HE CAME to us in his early life, during the first summer of our suburban residence. He was not an ostentatious cat, but a bedrabbled and bleary-eyed shirk of gray that sat guarding our milk bottles one morning when I opened the back door. Indeed, I have seldom seen a more forlorn specimen than was our stately "Possum" at this the moment of our introduction.

I forgot him presently, and was rather surprised when somewhat later I heard the "little woman" announce that there was a kitten clinging to the screen door and crying to come in. I went out to investigate, and found him half-way up the screen. Not being able to get through the wire, he had climbed it.

I pushed open the screen, and begged him to descend. This was impossible—he had not planned for retreat. His tendency was to climb higher. I was not eager to touch him, but there seemed no alternative. I detached him from the wire, I did not kick him. I would scorn to kick a cat, especially such a cat. I simply lifted him with my foot, and planted him in our experiment garden. He described an arc, and disappeared among the tomato vines. Flung wide the door, I rushed in, unwilling to investigate the result of my violence. A sound from behind caused me to start and turn. He was half-way up the screen, and going higher. I opened the portal gently. "Come in, little stranger," I said. And thus it was the prodigal became a part of our household.

As the days passed, the stranger grew strong and beautiful. Not being pure Maltese, I named him at first "Possum," but this little somehow seem-

ed frivolous, and savored of advertising, whereas "Possum" came trippingly from the tongue, and expressed more affectionately the deep regard and admiration which he presently awakened in us all. Whatever may have been his past, it was left behind with his bleary eyes and his emaciated tail. Both were fine and expressive within the month, and daily he grew in grace and noble self-respect. None knew him but to love him, and the occasional mouse, which I caught for him in a trap, was a slight token awarded in appreciation of his sterling qualities and unflinching appetite.

I have never seen a cat display more eagerness for mice. For as much as half a day, sometimes, he would watch the empty trap, doubtless recalling joys already tasted and those still to come. For me to begin setting it was the signal of violent enthusiasm on the part of our faithful mouser, and at morning he invariably rushed fearlessly to the spot, where the trap was known to do its most efficient work. There is even a rumor among our "precious ones" that "Possum" once captured a mouse on his own account. But the testimony in the case is confusing and contradictory. I am forced to believe the reports of this mouse's death have been "grossly exaggerated." However this may be, the advent of "Possum" has been much to us all, and if we knew his birthday we would add to it our anniversaries.

"Possum" is reliable in other ways. Even from the beginning he was inclined to be sober and dignified, and did not destroy frail objects in the wild gambols of kittenhood.

He was old and reflective even in his youth, and the ways of other cats